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**JACK ANDERSON and DALE VAN ATTA**

## How North Korea Got U.S. Helicopters

**T**he worst fears of federal officials who uncovered the illegal sale of U.S. civilian helicopters to North Korea have been confirmed by the latest top-secret intelligence from Seoul: North Korea apparently already has penetrated South Korean airspace with the choppers.

Administration officials have told us that the South Korean air force is so alarmed that it has grounded its U.S.-made choppers at various times.

The idea is to make sure that if ground troops (and anti-aircraft units) see one of the Hughes Helicopter Co. choppers nosing around south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) at a designated time, they will know it is a North Korean infiltrator.

In a war or emergency situation, it is obvious that the North Koreans could use their look-alikes to create confusion in South Korean defense forces and perhaps gain a crucial early advantage.

The tragedy is that U.S. intelligence had several major clues that the helicopter diversion to North Korea was taking place, but the right people in the Defense and Commerce departments—the people who certainly would have put a quick stop to it—were never informed. Here's the story:

In September 1983, U.S. Customs Service agents received detailed information that the North Koreans were illegally acquiring Hughes helicopters through a West German company. In fact, customs intelligence reported, two helicopters—the first of an eventual 87—had been shipped out of the United States six months earlier. Incredibly, the bill of lading filed with the Customs Service had listed a North Korean company as the

recipient. For still unexplained reasons, customs did not share this intelligence with the Commerce Department, whose undersecretary for international trade, Lionel H. Olmer, could have halted further shipments. And although customs did pass the information to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the DIA for some reason did not pass it on to the Pentagon official who undoubtedly would have spotted the security breach: Assistant Defense Secretary Richard N. Perle.

The West German company was able to buy and send five more shipments to North Korea. The last one before the Commerce Department caught on was sent in November when 15 helicopters left Los Angeles on a Panamanian freighter to Antwerp, Belgium. They were then loaded onto trucks and taken to Rotterdam. On Dec. 10, the choppers were loaded onto a Soviet ship, the K.H. Prorokov, which carried them to North Korea.

It wasn't until January that the Commerce Department learned in general about the illegal diversion and began an investigation. Hughes Helicopter Co. was cleared; Commerce is investigating the West German businessman who was crucial to the operation.

A high White House official described the helicopter diversion as "one of the most serious we've ever had" in more than a decade of Soviet-bloc efforts to beg, borrow and steal American technology.

The civilian helicopters North Korea obtained can easily be converted into military aircraft by adding machine guns, antitank rockets and air-to-ground missiles.